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Opponents say South Mountain Freeway too costly

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Plans for the South Mountain Freeway, which would allow Interstate 10 traffic to bypass Phoenix, drew criticism at a public meeting in Ahwatukee Wednesday night.

The Arizona Department of Transportation held the meeting on plans for the freeway, which would skirt the southern side of South Mountain, connecting I-10 in the west Valley with I-10 south of Phoenix.

John D. Rodriguez of the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team, said the cost of the roadway, plus the cost to the environment, is too high.

``Three-billion dollars, with a state that's in the red, it just doesn't make sense," Rodriguez said. ``The cost of three-billion dollars, the cost of losing part of South Mountain, potentially 600 homes, it just doesn't make sense."

He said people who have built near South Mountain and residents of the nearby Gila River Indian Community would lose.

The Native Americans, Rodriguez said, ``worship at the mountain. They have been doing that for hundreds of years, so the potential loss of that mountain is something that both communities would potentially lose."

He also said the freeway could cause health problems for children, noting that the proposed route is near Lagos Elementary School.

``Children that attend schools close to freeways have an 80 percent probability of developing some type of pulmonary diseases," Rodriguez said.

Another meeting will be held tonight at South Mountain Community College, beginning at 6 p.m. A final decision on the freeway is expected next year.